

# Top Teachers an Inspiration to Undergrads

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One is called a “tireless mentor” and the other an inspiration to students inside and outside the classroom. Linda Carroll and Michael Cunningham are exceptional teachers who are this year's winners of Weiss Presidential Fellowship awards for undergraduate teaching.



Recipients of the university's highest honors for teaching undergraduates are Linda Carroll, professor of Italian, and Michael Cunningham, associate professor of psychology. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Carroll, professor of Italian, and Cunningham, associate professor of psychology, received the awards at Tulane University Commencement on Saturday (May 17).

The fellowships recognize exemplary teaching of undergraduate students and are named in honor of Suzanne and Stephen Weiss.

The award includes a stipend of \$5,000 a year for four years to support research activities of the faculty members, who will keep the designation of Weiss fellow throughout their service at Tulane.

The professors were nominated for the award, now in its second year, by students and then selected by a provost's committee of faculty members and administrators.

Recipients must make a distinctive contribution to undergraduate teaching. Beyond the formal role of teacher, they must inspire and help students.

[Carroll](#), director and undergraduate adviser for the Italian studies program she co-founded, is an inspiration to students “inside and outside the classroom” with “an innate ability to make her students want to turn out first-rate work,” nominating letters say. One student says that a Latin motto embodies Carroll's work □ “docere illuminare ducere” (to teach, to illuminate and to lead).

Carroll cofounded a series of Italian courses taught in English that she believes provide a foundation for understanding the language.

A scholar of Venice during the Renaissance, Carroll is a strong proponent of study abroad. “Perhaps the ultimate indicator of teaching effectiveness is the success of our students who embark on the Junior Year Abroad program in Florence, in which they enroll directly in the Universita di Firenze,” she says.

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Students call [Cunningham](#) a “tireless mentor” and praise him for innovative classroom techniques as well as his exceptional teaching ability. A faculty member extols Cunningham's pioneering teaching that “served as the spark that ignited the service-learning movement on Tulane's campus.”

In 1997, his first year at Tulane, Cunningham required students in his course on black youth to tutor students in a public elementary school.

“I thought 'let's have students interact with black youth if they want to learn about black youth.' Direct experience coupled with theory and basic science facilitates learning,” Cunningham says.

Cunningham has a joint appointment with the [African and African Diaspora studies program](#).

His primary research interests include examining adolescent development in diverse contexts. Specifically, he examines resilience and vulnerability in African-American children and adolescents.

Cunningham also was selected as one of the 2008-09 [Duren Professors](#). His Duren course to be offered in spring 2009 will be “New Orleans' Youth: Resilience and Vulnerability in Tomorrow's Leaders.” The course will focus on the unique experiences of New Orleans high school students from Mardi Gras to rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina.